By What Authority?

For Military Personnel and Oath-Takers

A Reading for Those Who Have Sworn Allegiance and Want to Know What They Swore To

By What Authority? — For Military Personnel and Oath-Takers
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What you swore

When you were sworn in — to the military, to a police force, to the judiciary, to the public service, to citizenship — you made a commitment. You swore, in words chosen by someone else, to serve, protect, and uphold an authority: the Crown, the constitution, the sovereign, the state.

The act of swearing was not trivial. An oath is a particular kind of promise — one that invokes an authority beyond the two parties to the transaction. You were not just promising a person or an institution. You were invoking something that stands behind the institution and gives the institution its claim on you. When you swore, you placed yourself under that claim.

This reading does not question whether your service has been given in good faith. Most people who take oaths do so seriously and serve accordingly. The question this reading raises is different: whether you have ever been shown what the authority you swore to actually rests on, and whether that authority is what it claims to be.

What the oath rests on

In Australian constitutional law, the oath of allegiance is sworn to the sovereign. The sovereign's authority derives from the constitutional settlement, which derives from the Crown's acquisition of sovereignty over Australian territory, which derives from the Doctrine of Discovery and the royal prerogative.

The Doctrine of Discovery rests on two papal bulls: *Romanus Pontifex* (Nicholas V, 1455) and *Inter Caetera* (Alexander VI, 1493). These instruments granted to Christian European crowns the right to seize non-Christian territories and subjugate their peoples, on the authority of the Holy See acting in the name of God.

The Holy See's authority to grant temporal sovereignty derives from the church's claim to the apostolic succession descending from Peter, to whom Jesus gave "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" and the power to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. Below the Petrine commission, the church's claim to sanction temporal power also rests on the Pauline letters — especially Romans 13:1–7, which supplies the theological claim that all governing authority is instituted by God and must be obeyed.

The chain, traced backward, runs: your oath — the Crown — the constitutional settlement — the Doctrine of Discovery — the papal bulls — the church's claim to speak for God in temporal affairs — the Petrine commission and Romans 13:1–7 — Paul.

Romans 13:1–7 was probably not written by Paul — that is the argument this series makes, and Volume 2 sets out the evidence in full.

The passage behind the obligation

Romans 13:1–7 reads:

> *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.* (Romans 13:1–2)

This passage has been cited continuously, from the second century to the present, as the scriptural foundation for the claim that political authority is divinely ordained and that resistance to it is resistance to God. It was cited by Irenaeus to defend Roman imperial authority. It was the theological warrant that allowed the medieval church to claim it could sanction and withhold temporal power. It was the Pauline layer in the chain that produced the papal bulls. It has been cited by political theologians and military chaplains for two thousand years to justify unconditional service to lawful authority.

If that passage is authentic, this citation history rests on an apostolic foundation. If it was added to Paul's letters in the second century by writers who needed Christianity to be politically safe — who needed the communities associated with Paul's name to be demonstrably non-threatening to Roman imperial authority — then every use of this passage in the history of political theology rests on a manufactured document.

What the textual record shows

The structural evidence is direct. Romans 12:9–21 is a sustained argument about love — including instructions to feed an enemy, to overcome evil with good, not to take revenge, and to leave judgment to God. Romans 13:8–10 returns to the same theme: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another; for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." The submission-to-authority passage (Romans 13:1–7) sits between these two sections with no connecting argument. Remove it; the transition from "overcome evil with good" to "let no debt remain except love" is seamless. With it present, the connection requires explanation Paul does not provide.

The historical evidence is equally clear. Marcion of Sinope assembled the first known collection of Paul's letters around 140 CE. His text did not include Romans 13:1–7. The passage appears first as a citation in Irenaeus, writing after 144 CE, in the context of defending Roman imperial authority against critics who saw Christian communities as politically dangerous. The passage serves exactly the institutional purpose that context required.

New Testament scholar Jason BeDuhn's reconstruction of Marcion's text (*The First New Testament*, 2013) found no evidence that Marcion removed this passage for ideological reasons. It simply was not in the text he worked from. The five core evidence tests the series uses in summary — structural interruption, writing-style divergence, patristic silence, institutional usefulness, and theological direction — all converge on this passage as a later addition; Companion A records the same evidence through the fuller twelve-code apparatus.

The convergence is the argument. Each test is applied independently. Their convergence on the same passages — consistently, across the corpus — is what distinguishes purposeful editing from random copying error. Random errors scatter in all directions. These do not.

Romans 13 in the history of military and civic obligation

The history of this passage's use in military and civic contexts is a history of its usefulness to authority structures.

It was cited by the church fathers to discourage military resistance to Rome when Rome was hostile to Christianity. It was cited after Constantine to support Christian participation in imperial military service. It was cited throughout the medieval period to support crusade, to support the suppression of heresy, and to support the authority of rulers who had received their legitimacy from the church.

In the early modern period it was cited to support submission to whatever sovereign held temporal power — including, notoriously, by Luther in the context of the German Peasants' War of 1524–1525, when he argued that the peasants had no scriptural warrant to resist their lords. It was cited in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to support the authority of colonial governments. It was cited by German churches during the Third Reich to argue for submission to the state.

The history of this passage is a history of institutional authority citing the claim that all governing authority comes from God to insulate itself from challenge. Every institution that has held power in the Western world, from Rome to the present day, has had access to this passage as a theological warrant for submission. It has been used accordingly, consistently, across two millennia.

Whether the passage is authentic is not a small question. If it is authentic, it reflects an apostolic theological position that governing authority is divinely ordained. If it is not authentic — if it was inserted by people whose institutional survival depended on Christianity not being perceived as a threat to

Roman order — then two thousand years of political theology built on this passage were built on a contested foundation.

The authentic voice on authority

Paul's authenticated letters — the letters that survive the reconstruction with the strongest evidentiary support — say something quite different about authority and power.

Galatians argues that the categories governing bodies use to sort and rank people — ethnic identity, legal status, gender — are dissolved by the prior reality of grace:

> *There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3:28)

This is not an aspiration. It is a claim about what the community Paul is building is constituted by. The categories that determine rank in the Roman world — and in a military world — do not constitute it. Something prior to those categories has arrived.

Romans 8, stripped of its contested sections, makes the claim most directly:

> *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus… neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God.* (Romans 8:1, 38–39)

No ruler. No power. No height. No depth. The claim is unconditional. It does not carve out an exception for governing authorities. It includes them in the list of powers that do not, finally, determine what is given to the person.

This is not the theology of submission to authority. It is the theology of a prior claim that outranks authority. The passage that replaced it — telling communities to submit to governing authorities because all authority is from

God — serves the opposite function. It is the passage an institution needs. It is not the passage Paul wrote.

On oaths

The New Testament has one direct statement about oaths. It is attributed to Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

> *Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn." But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil.* (Matthew 5:33–37)

The early Quaker tradition took this seriously enough that Friends refused to take oaths in court and in public life, accepting affirmations instead. Many jurisdictions now provide for solemn affirmation as an alternative to the oath for exactly this reason.

Whether this saying applies to the formal oaths of public and military life is a question this series does not resolve. But it is worth noting: the tradition to which your oath appeals — the apostolic Christianity whose authority underwrites the sovereign's claim — contains, in one of its oldest recoverable layers, a direct statement against swearing of any kind. The tradition that asks you to swear contains a voice that tells you not to.

The oath architecture

Volume 3 of this series examines what it calls the oath architecture — the layered system of sworn obligations that binds institutional actors to the sovereignty chain at each level, and that maintains the chain across generations without the foundation being examined.

At the foundation, the sovereign's authority is established through the chain of instruments described above. Above that, constitutional instruments incorporate that authority into domestic law. Above that, every judicial officer swears to uphold the constitution. Every officer of the court is admitted under obligations to a court of the sovereign. Every public servant, military officer, and naturalising citizen swears an oath to the Crown.

The oath architecture is how the chain maintains itself. Each person who swears in does so in good faith. But each oath also binds the person to an authority whose foundational claim they have not been invited to examine, and the structure of the oath creates institutional pressure against examination. A judge who has sworn to uphold the constitution is not ordinarily positioned, in the act of judicial decision-making, to step outside the constitution and interrogate the legitimacy of the authority that grants it. A military officer who has sworn to the Crown is not ordinarily invited to treat the Crown's foundational claim as an open evidentiary question.

This is not a criticism of the individuals inside the structure. It is a description of how the structure works. The oath architecture was not designed to conceal a contested foundation. It was designed to secure institutional continuity. The effect is that the foundation is sealed from examination from within. Each generation inherits it, swears to it, and defends it in good faith, without having been told what the foundation actually is.

What this does not ask of you

This reading is not asking you to violate your oath, resign your commission, refuse service, or take any action based on this argument.

The argument the series makes is evidentiary and historical. It documents the chain of authority, traces each link to its primary sources, and presents the evidence that specific foundational instruments are manufactured. The political and legal questions that follow from such a finding are questions for the society as a whole, not for individuals serving inside the structure.

What the series asks is a narrower question: have you been told the truth about what the authority you serve actually rests on? Has the chain been followed all the way back and examined with the rigour applied to any other documentary chain?

The evidence suggests it has not.

People who serve in good faith are not diminished by discovering that the authority they serve may rest on a contested foundation. They are, if anything, owed the evidence about it. The series is an attempt to provide that evidence in full.

The oath in the tradition you swore by

When you took your oath, you probably did not think about the theological history of the act. But the oath you swore draws its form and its claimed binding force from a tradition that has specific things to say about oaths, about authority, and about the relationship between individual conscience and institutional obligation.

That tradition is the apostolic Christian tradition — the tradition whose authority underwrites the sovereign you swore to. And that tradition, in its oldest recoverable layer, says: do not swear at all.

The New Testament passage on this is not peripheral. It is in the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most cited sections of the gospel tradition: "Do not take an oath at all… Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew 5:33–37). The early Quakers took this seriously enough to refuse oaths of any kind, including in court, and their persistent refusal eventually changed the law: most jurisdictions now permit solemn affirmation as an alternative for exactly this reason.

The institution that built the oath architecture did not follow this saying. It required oaths of its officials, its military, its courts, and its subjects. It built an entire structure of sworn obligation into the constitutional order of the states it influenced. And the authority to which all those oaths were sworn ultimately rests — as this series shows — on a chain of documents that includes a passage probably not written by Paul and a commission that shows signs of late insertion.

The tradition you swore by does not, at its oldest recoverable level, support the practice it built its institutional structure around. That is not an argument against serving. It is an observation about the internal consistency of the authority being claimed.

What the whole argument adds up to

The series makes an argument across three volumes that can be summarised at three levels.

At the textual level: Paul's authenticated letters were edited after 144 CE by writers with specific institutional interests. The editing is detectable. The passages added are identifiable. The methodology for identifying them is stated in full and is checkable.

At the historical level: the edited Paul was used to construct a theological warrant for institutional authority. That warrant became the basis for the church's claim to sanction temporal power. That claim produced the specific instruments — the papal bulls of the fifteenth century — that became the foundational authority for the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine was incorporated into the constitutional law of settler colonies and remains foundational to their sovereign claims.

At the constitutional level: the chain of authority that underpins the oaths of every public servant, military officer, judicial officer, and citizen in those states has never been followed all the way back and examined as a documentary chain. When it is, the series argues that the chain does not terminate in a clearly legitimate apostolic warrant. It terminates in a warrant whose provenance is seriously contested.

This is not an argument that individual service is dishonoured. It is an argument that the authority structure within which service has been given has a foundational problem that has not been disclosed to the people it binds.

A passage with a long history of institutional use

Romans 13:1–7 has been cited in military and civic contexts across two thousand years of political theology. That history is worth understanding.

It was cited by the church fathers to discourage resistance to Rome when Rome was hostile to Christianity — the institutional logic being that submission was both scripturally required and politically prudent. After Constantine made Christianity the empire's favoured religion, it was used to support Christian participation in imperial military campaigns. It was cited throughout the medieval period to argue that military service in defence of the Christian order — crusades included — was not merely permitted but obligatory. The authority that commanded the service was divinely instituted; resistance to it was resistance to God.

In the early modern period, Luther cited it during the German Peasants' War of 1524–25 to argue that the peasants, despite genuine grievances, had no scriptural warrant to resist their lords. The lords were governing authorities. The governing authorities were instituted by God. Whatever one thought of their conduct, Romans 13 said to submit. The argument was decisive, and Luther's position contributed to the suppression of the revolt.

In the colonial period the passage was cited to support submission to colonial governments — by colonial subjects, by indigenous peoples, by enslaved people who were told that the authority claiming dominion over them was divinely instituted. The same passage that told Roman subjects to submit to Nero told African subjects to submit to colonial administrators.

In the twentieth century it was cited in various contexts to support submission to state authority, including, notoriously, in Germany in the 1930s. The Barmen Declaration of 1934, issued by the Confessing Church against the German Christians who had aligned with National Socialism, was in part a

theological argument against the misuse of Romans 13 to support submission to a state that was demanding the church's complicity.

The passage has been used, consistently, by governing authorities in the Western world to produce submission from the communities they governed. That is not coincidence. On the argument developed here, that is the institutional function the passage served: it produced politically safe Christian subjects, and it has performed that function for two thousand years.

What the reconstruction opens for you personally

This reading is not asking you to reach a conclusion about your service. It is asking whether you were told the truth about the authority you serve.

The oath you swore invoked an authority. That authority traces through a chain. The chain has a foundation. The foundation has never been examined at depth, and the oath architecture that maintains the chain across generations is part of why it has not been examined.

The series performs the examination. What it finds at the foundation is a manufactured document — a passage inserted into Paul's letters by people who needed it there, for institutional reasons that are visible in the historical record.

That is a finding about the chain of authority, not about your personal service. Whether it changes how you understand your obligation is a question only you can answer. But you are entitled to the information, and this series provides it.

Where to go from here

Volume 3 — The Chain from Scripture to Sovereignty traces the sovereignty chain in detail, including the oath architecture and how it functions. It examines the specific instruments — the papal bulls, the case law, the constitutional provisions — as primary source documents, with the chain traced link by link.

Volume 1 gives the argument in brief and is the best starting point for someone coming without specialist background.

Volume 2 sets out the full textual evidence for the Pauline interpolations. If you want to assess the evidentiary case for yourself — the manuscript record, the patristic silence evidence, the writing-style analysis, the methodology — the evidence is set out there in full.

Appendix H of Volume 3 identifies the principal contested claims and the strongest counter-arguments. The series does not ask you to accept its conclusions without examining the counter-cases. It asks only that you examine the record.

The question the series leaves you with is not: what do you do now? It is: did you know this? And if you did not, why not?

A note on what you were not told

You were not given the information this series contains. The series argues that is not an accident. The oath architecture functions in part by sealing the foundational question from examination within the structure it maintains. Each generation inherits the foundation, swears to it, and defends it without having been told what the foundation actually is.

This document is free. The full volumes are free. The dataset and analysis tools are public. No credential is required to access them. The series operates on the basis that people who serve in good faith are owed the evidence — before any institution decides whether they should have it.

If the argument is wrong, everything you need to demonstrate that is already in your hands.

This document summarises the legal-historical and textual argument developed in Volumes 1–3 of the By What Authority series. Scholarly citations, methodology, and full evidence are in those volumes. This document does not constitute legal or military legal advice and does not address the specific terms of any individual's oath or service obligation.